

# **Military Risk Communication in a Changing World**

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# Overview

- ✍ Today's military risk communication challenges
- ✍ What is risk communication?
- ✍ What does it take to be effective?
- ✍ Current military issues and initiatives
- ✍ Conclusion

# Today's Military Challenge

## Democracy vs Security

- Right to know
- Expect to participate in decision making affecting individual, community
- Dialogue essential in today's society

## Individual/Community vs National

- Initial anthrax vaccination program
- Smallpox vaccination debate
- APG cleanup information debate

# **Military Risk Communication Challenges**

## **Deployment/Post-deployment**

- Environmental conditions at third world deployment locations
- Inconsistent approach to risk communication leading to confusion and raising health concerns

## **Homeland Security**

- Rules of engagement uncertain
- Changes required in coordination and communication approaches

## **Environmental cleanup program**

- Sometimes single public interaction with military
- Established rules of engagement
- Current debate on information sharing

# What is Risk Communication?

 **Risk communication is a strategic planning process**

- Identifies motives and needs of those impacted and anticipates reactions
- Requires dialogue on uncertainties and complexities of risk, and more
- Must be done in the context of respect and trust

 **Enhances crisis coordination and communication effectiveness**

# Basic Requirements

- ✍ **Three A's of Risk Communication**
  - Anticipate
  - Analyze
  - Adjust
- ✍ **Establish and maintain an effective communication network internally - all levels**
- ✍ **Build and maintain relationships and communication networks with other stakeholders – all levels**
- ✍ **Trust and respect are the foundation**

# Why is it difficult?

## Continuing lack of public trust in government

- Can be traced back to Watergate and Vietnam
- Continues because of government actions
- Trust is not transferable from one individual to another, nor from one program to another
  - » Post-9/11, trust in government regarding Homeland Security
  - » Lack of trust in government ability to fix economy

## Lack of past commitment to strategic partnerships with stakeholders

- Key factor in adversarial situations
- Military command & control culture, not open debate
- Government's historic "Decide, Announce, Defend" approach

# Why is it Difficult?

## Scientific uncertainty and debate

- Low societal intolerance of risk
- Certainty vs. uncertainty
- Research vs. research
- Internet access makes everybody an “expert

## Lack of early risk communication and stakeholder involvement efforts resulting in adversarial situations

- Requires concerted commitment, effort, resources, to turn around; sometimes cannot be turned around
  - » Massachusetts Military Reservation
  - » Vieques



# What it Takes

## Commitment

- From top down
- Consistent and integrated

## Dollars

- Prioritized and planned into budgets
- Leverage resources with strategic partnerships

## People

- Enough people
- Right skill mix

# Effective Risk Management

- ✍ Understand the “real” issues driving behavior
- ✍ Collaborate with partners and other stakeholders on problem identification and determining appropriate solutions
- ✍ Balance good science with regulatory, social, economic, timing, and political realities of the situation

# **Military Issues and Initiatives**

 **Deployment/Post-Deployment**

 **Homeland Security**

 **Environmental Cleanup**

# Deployment/Post-deployment

## Background

- Lessons learned from Agent Orange and Gulf War
- Environmental contamination found at air base in Uzbekistan
- Risk assessment conducted, protective measures put in place, briefings conducted, article in local newsletter
- Returning service members voiced health concerns to Congressional Representatives
- Several requests for assistance from military unit leaders to address continuing environmental health concerns

# Deployment/Post-deployment

## Stakeholders involved:

- U.S. and coalition service members, unit leaders, family members
- Congress
- Secretary of the Army
- Military Service Surgeon Generals
- CENTCOM
- USACHPPM, AFIERA, NEHC, Deployment Health Clinical Center (DHCC)
- Health Care Providers

# Deployment/Post-deployment

## Risk communication strategic plan

- USACHPPM conducted initial research of post-deployment questionnaire database
- Convened cross-service workgroup to identify common issues and plan to address
- Agreed on roles and responsibilities
- Agreed on approach to gain additional information
- Began implementing strategy

# Deployment/Post-deployment

## Plan of action

- Obtain information directly from returning service members
- Provide factual information to participants and others
- Provide risk communication training opportunity for unit leaders and others responsible for interacting on the issues

## Information will inform improved policies and processes

# Deployment/Post-Deployment

## Results to Date

- Two Post-Deployment Workshop/Focus Groups conducted; others planned
  - » inconsistent information & instructions
  - » lack of accurate or complete information
  - » briefings and written products not adequate communication tools

## DHCC cross-service post-deployment clinician training program



# Deployment/Post-deployment

## Desired outcome

- Improved pre-, during, and post-deployment OEH surveillance and risk communication policies and processes
- Better-informed U.S. and coalition soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines
- Reduced environmentally-related stress

# Homeland Security

## Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosive (CBRNE)

- Anthrax
- Smallpox
- “Dirty Bomb”
- Food and water supplies

## Roles and responsibilities

- DOD support local government response
- Need for coordination across agencies

# Homeland Security

## Stakeholders involved

- First responders (police, fire departments, emergency response teams)
- Local, state, and federal agencies
- Installation Commanders and workers
- Local communities
- Health care facilities, military and civilian
- Media
- Internet Service Providers
- Telecommunication Network Providers

# Homeland Security

## Risk communication planning

- Identify key internal and external partners
- Identify roles and responsibilities
- Agree on methods of coordinating and communicating in the event of attack
- Develop and agree on contingency plan in case communication systems fail
- Develop and implement education programs for workers and general public
- Integrate into comprehensive response plan

# Homeland Security

## Desired Outcomes

- Anticipate and prepare for attack
- Well-informed public
- Well-coordinated response in the event of attack
- Reduced panic
- Lives saved

# Environmental Cleanup

- ✍ Continue to clean up the environment at military installations
- ✍ Continue crucial partnerships with our neighbors to collaboratively resolve issues
  - Statutory, regulatory, policy constraints
  - Priority-setting
- ✍ Sustain readiness through environmental stewardship

# Take-Away Points

- ✍ If we engage in strategic risk communication planning from the beginning, we should not find ourselves in adversarial situations
- ✍ Where relationships are broken, don't hide behind the fence; use risk communication planning and tools to build bridges
- ✍ Where relationships are working, share methods and approaches with others

# Conclusion

- ✍ The military, the nation, and the world are facing several new challenges
- ✍ A strategic and integrated risk communication planning process is essential
- ✍ Through sound and consistent risk communication processes, the U.S. military, its allies, and neighbors can meet the challenges of today's changing world